CLAIM SET AS AMENDED

1. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for estimating a manufacturing cost for a product comprising:

an a first input device for receiving input data concerning physical characteristics of a the product to be manufactured;

a cost calculation processor for calculating a the manufacturing cost based on information inputted from said <u>first</u> input device, and cost factor data, data which is independently supplied from an external source using a second input device; and

a display device for displaying a-the calculated manufacturing cost from said cost calculation processor,

wherein said cost calculation processor calculates a plurality of alternative manufacturing costs, with each of the alternative manufacturing eost costs being associated with a respective one of a plurality of alternative process series for manufacturing the product, when a the plurality of process series are being entered via said first input device; and

wherein said display device displays the plurality <u>of</u> calculated manufacturing costs for the plurality of process series.

2. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said cost calculation processor is arranged to calculate manufacturing costs for individual process steps of the plurality of

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process series; and wherein said display device displays the calculated manufacturing costs

for the individual process steps.

3. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said physical characteristics

include at least one of a shape, a thickness, and a material composition of the product to be

manufactured.

4. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said external source comprises:

a variable cost memory; and

a fixed cost memory.

5. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said variable cost memory and said

fixed cost memory are connected to said cost calculation processor via an in-house net

connection.

6. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said variable cost memory and said

fixed cost memory are connected to said cost calculation processor via an internet

connection.

7. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said input device is located in an

in-house development department.

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8. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said external source receives data

from in-house production facilities and outsourced component makers.

9. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said in-house production facilities

are connected to said external source via an in-house net connection, and wherein said

outsourced component makers are connected to said external source via an internet

connection.

10. (Cancelled)

11. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said external source comprises:

a variable cost memory; and

a fixed cost memory.

12. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said variable cost memory and

said fixed cost memory are connected to said cost calculation processor via an in-house net

connection.

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13. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said variable cost memory and

said fixed cost memory are connected to said cost calculation processor via an internet

connection.

14. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said input device is located in an

in-house development department.

15. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said external source receives data

from in-house production facilities and outsourced component makers.

16. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 15, wherein said in-house production

facilities are connected to said external source via an in-house net connection, and wherein

said outsourced component makers are connected to said external source via an internet

connection.

17. (Withdrawn) A method of estimating a manufacturing cost for a product, said method

comprising the steps of:

entering physical characteristics data concerning the product to be made;

storing the characteristics data in a first memory;

accessing a second memory storing cost factors provided by a plurality of producers;

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calculating estimated costs for manufacturing the product relative to the plurality of

the producers; and

displaying the estimated costs for the plurality of producers.

18. (Withdrawn) The method according to claim 17, further comprising the step of:

updating the cost factors stored in the second memory by the plurality of producers.

19. (Withdrawn) The method according to claim 17, wherein said calculating step further

includes figuring manufacturing costs for individual process steps of each of the plurality of

producers; and wherein said displaying step further includes revealing the calculated

manufacturing costs for the individual process steps.

20. (Withdrawn) The method according to claim 17, wherein said accessing step takes place

via an internet connection.

21. (New) An apparatus for estimating a manufacturing cost for a product comprising:

a first input device and an associated first display device for receiving and viewing

input data concerning physical characteristics of the product to be manufactured;

a cost calculation processor for calculating the manufacturing cost based on

information inputted from said first input device, and cost factor data independently supplied

from an external source using a second input device;

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said first display device for displaying the calculated manufacturing costs from said

cost calculation processor,

wherein, upon entering a plurality of alternative process series for manufacturing the

product via said first input device, said cost calculation processor calculates a plurality of

alternative manufacturing costs, with each of the alternative manufacturing costs being

associated with a respective one of the plurality of alternative process series for

manufacturing the product, and displays said plurality of calculated manufacturing costs on

said first display device,

wherein the calculated manufacturing costs displayed on said first display device

change based on the cost factor data independently supplied from the external source using

the second input device.